

JESSE RODIN

*Performing Josquin in 2021: A New Approach*¹

in collaboration with members of Cut Circle Ensemble: Bradford Gleim (Artistic Advisor and tenor); Jonas Budris (altus), Corrine Byrne (superius), Lawrence Jones (altus), Sonja DuToit Tengblad (superius) e Paul Max Tip-ton (bassus)

Performing polyphony – talk about a subject on which everyone has an opinion. So many factors conspire against honest engagement with the problem: a dearth of contemporary writings on performance practice; musical sources that fail to tell us the many things that singers of the period didn't need to be told; and a series of interlocking modern performance traditions that can't help but impinge on our thinking. Today I would like to ask: can we do anything to get closer to a sound for Josquin des Prez that does justice to the music's aesthetic goals?²

For the past several decades, performances of Josquin's vocal music have favored an approach that seems to have been developed mainly in the United Kingdom in the 1970s by David Wulstan and expanded in the early 1980s by groups such as the Tallis Scholars and the Hilliard Ensemble.³ This ap-

¹ This essay is a lightly modified version of a paper presented on the 500th anniversary of Josquin's death at the international conference *Cantare la polifonia da Josquin a Philippe de Monte | Singing Polyphony from Josquin to Philippe de Monte* (Arezzo, 25-27 August 2021). I have chosen to allow most elements of the original, orally delivered text to stand. My thanks to the members of Cut Circle who joined me in presenting this material. I am especially grateful to Bradford Gleim, Sonja DuToit Tengblad, and Corrine Byrne, professors of voice at, respectively, the Berklee College of Music, Wellesley College, and the Longy School of Music, for sharing their thoughts on various aspects of vocal theory and pedagogy. I am also grateful to the Fondazione Guido d'Arezzo, above all Lorenzo Donati, Alfredo Grandini, Cecilia Luzzi, and Stefano Mengozzi, who at every turn has been ready with a helping hand.

² For discussion of some of these issues in a slightly different context, see JESSE RODIN, *The Songbook as Sensory Artifact*, in *Sensory Reflections: Traces of Experience in Medieval Artifacts*, edited by Fiona Griffiths and Kathryn Starkey, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 22-49.

³ An early example is *The Clerkes of Oxenford*, directed by David Wulstan, *Music of Thomas Tallis & John Sheppard* (EMI Classics, 1974). Even Wulstan's approach was arguably not so very novel, in that it emerged fairly seamlessly out of the Anglican choral tradition of the 1930s and following; see TIMOTHY DAY, *I Saw Eternity the Other Night: King's College*,

proach has much to recommend it: good tuning, rhythmic accuracy, and vibrato-free singing that makes it possible to hear the individual lines – all features that helped spark an appreciation of Renaissance music by a generation of enthusiasts and scholars, myself included. By now most of Josquin’s securely attributed works are available in high-quality recordings that adopt this general performance style.⁴

Still, with every approach come benefits and costs – and significant drawbacks can be associated with a sound that emerged out of the *bel canto* and Anglican choral traditions and through experience with much later sixteenth-century repertoires. On reflection it seems likely that however attractive, the sound for Renaissance polyphony made popular some four decades ago and still in vogue today would have been unfamiliar to listeners in the years around 1500.

For the period of Josquin’s activity as a musician – let’s call it 1460-1520 – we possess a wealth of musical sources, alongside payment records, legal documents, scattered visual depictions of performing musicians, and a few treatises, commentaries, and letters that offer insight about performance aesthetics. This may sound like a lot – but as is well known, with respect to performance practice the documentary record is in fact thin. In most cases it is difficult or even impossible to draw firm conclusions. And even where firm conclusions are possible, we must always ask how far they apply. On some subjects, after all, what was popular in Florence may have been unthinkable in Arezzo.

Cambridge, and an English Singing Style, London, Allen Lane/Penguin, 2018. The Tallis Scholars, directed by Peter Phillips, made their debut in 1980 with *Alleghi, Miserere, Palestrina, Missa Papae Marcelli; Mundy, Vox patris caelestis* (Gimell Records). Their earliest recording of music by Josquin (*Missa Pange lingua; Missa La sol fa re mi*) appeared with the same label in 1986.

⁴ The Tallis Scholars, for instance, recently concluded a series of recordings devoted to twenty of the thirty-three mass cycles somewhere attributed to Josquin. See, most conveniently, <https://www.gimell.com/all>. More generally, the recording catalogue is weighted toward a small collection of pieces that has achieved notoriety in modern times, even if a number of these (e.g., *Absalon fili mi* and *Mille regretz*) is probably spurious. By contrast, several secure or provisionally attributable works (e.g., *Factum est autem, Qui habitat*, and *Je n’ose plus*) have been recorded hardly at all. With respect to the masses, fourteen cycles are plausibly attributable to Josquin. Overall, the number of authentic works stands at about 103. See JESSE RODIN, *The Josquin Canon at 500, with an Appendix Produced in Collaboration with Joshua Rifkin*, «Early Music», 2022, caab62, available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/em/caab062> (all the websites referenced here and below were last accessed on 1 February 2022).

One of the richest texts we have, and also a good example of the challenges the surviving evidence poses, is the 1471 treatise *De modo bene cantandi* by the German theologian and preacher Conrad von Zabern.⁵ At first blush this treatise, the earliest known manual of practical singing technique, would appear to contain a wealth of information. Most tantalizing, as Joseph Dyer has noted, is the impressive number of injunctions Conrad makes—and as we all know, writers who attack generally do so because the practices they are attacking are prevalent. Conrad doesn't like rough, coarse singing, which he associates with rural environments; it is better to be refined, that is, urbane. In particular, he hates it when singers hold high notes longer than other notes; when they use the extremes of their ranges; when they sing 'h' on a melisma; when they sing the wrong vowel; and when the singing is nasal, forced, not together, or out of tune. He is also against «singing high notes with an unstintingly full and powerful voice», a style he goes on to call «careless» and to liken to «shouting», and which leads him to compose the hilarious couplet:

Ut boves in pratis, | sic vos in choro boatis.⁶
Like cows in the meadow, so do you in the choir bellow!

At the same time, Conrad doesn't like it when musicians sing sleepily and lifelessly. He advocates animated, affective, joyful performances.

Conrad's text is rich in detail and highly entertaining – but I can think of at least four reasons why we should treat it with caution. First, he was writing not for professional polyphonists, but for monastic singers performing liturgical chant. The aesthetic principles he articulates may simply not be relevant to polyphony. Second, Conrad was a churchman and a reformer who openly opposed non-notated polyphony as well as the introduction of vernacular songs into the liturgy. This is not a treatise by someone who would have appreciated the polyphonic masses sung in Ercole d'Este's court. Third, Conrad was German. Compared to the world-class musical establishments at Milan, Rome, the French royal court, and Condé-sur-l'Escaut, he was working in polyphonic backwaters (Strasbourg, Basel, and Mainz); can we really take his views on singing as representative? Fourth, his criticisms – note in particular his dislike of powerful, trumpet-like voices – may point to practices that

⁵ See JOSEPH DYER, *Singing with proper refinement from "De modo bene cantandi" (1474) by Conrad von Zabern*, «Early Music», VI, 2, 1978, pp. 207-227; and ID., *The Voice in the Middle Ages*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, edited by John Potter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 165-177.

⁶ See DYER, *Singing with proper refinement* cit., pp. 216 f. and *passim*.

were actively cultivated by enthusiasts. Indeed reading between the lines, it seems likely that loud, demonstrative, showy, trumpet-like singing was common, even if many conservative churchmen didn't like it.

It is worth underscoring these points because some have been too quick to read into texts like Conrad's aesthetic values that they themselves would like to see projected onto the music of the distant past – aesthetic values that, to paraphrase Christopher Page, may tell us above all about modern academic sensibilities.⁷ In fact Page himself tends to reify those sensibilities in his performances, which in many ways uphold a by now classically English choral ideal.⁸ Which brings us to a second and ultimately more important issue: the too often unexamined origins of the modern sound for Renaissance polyphony.

I have been listening to early recordings of English choral ensembles, which include some extremely beautiful examples. I have also been reading about the origins of what we very loosely call the *bel canto* technique, including a fascinating dissertation by Sarah Potter on English vocal pedagogy.⁹ Let me summarize what seem to be the most salient points.

Today most teachers of classical voice instruct their students to lower the larynx by default. In singing and in speech, a low laryngeal position facilitates a sound that, to resort unavoidably to metaphors, is round, spacious, and resonant. But in fact the cultivation of the low larynx in the West is a very recent phenomenon, dating only to the 1830s, as can be observed in the writings

⁷ See CHRISTOPHER PAGE, *Discarding Images*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.

⁸ See ID., *The Performance of Songs in Late Medieval France: A New Source*, «Early Music», X, 4, 1982, pp. 441–450: 441. Page describes a then prominent strand of the early music movement ca. 1980 that privileged «individualized lines ... a polyphony which is extrovert and almost heraldic in color, which is candid, even naïve». Some of the practices against which Page was doubtless reacting – strange instrumental doublings, mixtures of historical and ahistorical instruments, and so on – must have been maddening for a scholar interested in historically informed performance. Nonetheless, one senses in Page's writings and performances with “Gothic Voices” a determined jettisoning of the baby with the bathwater, that is, a hard rejection of timbral heterogeneity, as if this practice were inseparable from what he considers to be ahistorical uses of instruments. See also ANNA ZAYARUZNAYA, *Intelligibility Redux: Motets and the Modern Medieval Sound*, «Music Theory Online», XXIII, 2017 < <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.2/mto.17.23.2.zayaruznaya.html>, and the literature cited there. Zayaruznaya rightly notes that «the timbre of Gothic Voices was inherited perhaps too readily from the English choral tradition». In what follows I seek to connect Zayaruznaya's advocacy of heterogeneous timbres to the history of vocal technique.

⁹ SARAH POTTER, *Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2014, especially ch. 2, and the literature cited there.

of the Spanish singer and vocal pedagogue Manuel García II. Historically speaking the 1830s are yesterday. It is impossible to imagine the pervasive application of this technique in the years around 1500.

Now let us consider the Anglican choral tradition, which inspired groups like the Tallis Scholars. By the early twentieth century the spacious low larynx had been naturalized as an aesthetic ideal. What is interesting is what happens when choirboys learn to sing in this aesthetic context.¹⁰ Boys naturally have smaller voices with little or no vibrato. The best English choirs were therefore able to produce an often stunningly beautiful, pristine, ‘angelic’ sound – a sound that is rounded and relatively clear. When applied to Renaissance polyphony, the absence of vibrato, in particular, allows the individual lines to be heard, which seems like a *sine qua non* for this repertoire, with its emphasis on independent, rhythmically active melodic lines. Thus, the early music sound is born. All the Tallis Scholars had to do was adapt this same sound to professional adults.

I am passing over a lot, and I am simplifying a lot – but I want to insist that this is a core piece of the puzzle. If we approach the era of Josquin through the idea that a low laryngeal position was, although possible, almost certainly not cultivated as a default, we find ourselves in unfamiliar aesthetic waters. In classical singing today a low laryngeal position translates to a throat that is pervasively ‘open’, as when we yawn. Giving up on this principle does not generate a single, unitary alternative. But broadly speaking, we can talk about a more ‘speech-like’ space within the vocal tract that causes the larynx not to drop but remain in a position that is more or less that of talking. This in turn can make vowels and timbre seem, to resort once again to metaphor, much brighter and more forward. Some of us have been taught to believe that this bright, mid- or high-laryngeal approach sounds rough or ‘untrained’, as with a folk or pop musician. But of course we all know and appreciate other uses of the voice. And we all know that many pop singers are highly trained. There is a reason we love Stevie Wonder and Mia Martini.

¹⁰ Note that the preferred low laryngeal position need not be actively trained, but can rather be cultivated through practical experience. By way of example: at a children’s choir rehearsal I observed in Los Altos, California in 2019, the well-meaning director responded to the sound she was hearing by saying: «Don’t sing like this [she demonstrated a high-laryngeal production that she took to be ugly]; sing beautifully, like this [she demonstrated a sound produced with a dropped larynx]». The deeply rooted value judgments that underpin such comments are too often unexamined, and can be poisonous to a person’s sense of the quality of their own voice. In any case one can see how a simple demonstration by a choir director, or even the experience of standing next to someone who sings in the ‘right’ way, can have the desired effect without the larynx being referenced even once.

It also can't be totally irrelevant that virtually no one naturally speaks with a low larynx,¹¹ and that the overwhelming majority of vocal traditions around the world prefer a high or middle larynx, which are used to create many different effects. Trawling through YouTube turns up an avalanche of examples, a tiny sampling of which can serve to make this very general point. I invite readers to listen to a series of polyphonic performances from ensembles based in:

1. Georgia: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rg8xrdbnH8E&t=110s>>
2. Madagascar: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fs1d7wn9Qw&t=7s>>
3. France (Pyénées): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbBH13O1ow8&t=117s>>
4. United States (Destiny's Child): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQgd6MccwZc>>
5. China (Dong Singers): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwOxih86Tlk&t=102s>>
6. Sardinia: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-m3V1cwnPY&t=79s>>

The last two examples are especially interesting because they feature high-laryngeal production in reverberant acoustics. To the extent that these acoustical environments mimic those of a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century church, one can see how the reverberation 'softens' the 'harshness' – the scare quotes draw attention to the inevitable value judgments that attend the still unavoidable metaphors – of high-laryngeal vocal production.

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that these traditions are all the same, nor am I suggesting that we should pick one and copy it. On the contrary, my point is that there are many different ways polyphonic music can sound good. What I think unites these heterogeneous traditions, and where I see a connection to what Cut Circle is doing, is in a widespread preference for what Hans Gumbrecht calls «presence», here a bright, extroverted sound that brings the details of the music literally and metaphorically forward.¹²

What Cut Circle is doing is not only about the larynx. From the long fifteenth century we have descriptions of public crying of a kind that today would make most of us blush: extreme expressions of emotion were not just common, but required.¹³ We have shawms and crumhorns, double-reed instruments that create wonderfully bright, forceful sounds. And we have images of singers

¹¹ Of course, one can train oneself to do so, as with so many other uses of the voice. Radio announcers, for instance, often cultivate a low laryngeal position, presumably in an effort to sound 'professional' and 'smooth.'

¹² HANS ULRICH GUMBRECHT, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2004.

¹³ These are described most memorably in JOHAN HUIZINGA, *Autumnside of the Middle Ages*, eng. trans. Diane Webb, edited by Graeme Small and Anton van der Lem, [Leiden], Leiden University Press, 2020 (orig. ed. *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen*, Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1919).

standing close to one another, deep in concentration, whether in Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* (figure 1) or Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*.¹⁴ None of this evidence points to – metaphors again – the blended, distant, dark, polite, emotionally detached style that is so common today in performances of Western polyphony. I wonder how much of this style is about the emergence of the early music performance tradition out of buttoned-up Oxford and Cambridge. And I wonder how much of it is about fear – fear of displaying emotion in the context of academics and of older, conservative audiences.



Fig. 1 – Luca della Robbia, *Cantoria*, Firenze, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, (dettaglio), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Cantoria_di_luca_della_rob-bia_01.JPG&oldid=567154591> [accessed 7 luglio 2022]

So now the question becomes: once we strip away that for which we have no supporting evidence, what is left? And how do we adapt what is left to the needs of this repertoire? Let's remind ourselves of some basics. As many won-

¹⁴ For a closeup of the latter, see the cover of Cut Circle's album *Messes Anonymes: Missa Gross senen, Missa Lardant desir* (Musique en Wallonie, 2021), viewable at <<https://www.musiwall.uliege.be/product/messes-anonymes>>.

derful ensembles since at least the 1970s have demonstrated, this music rests on a foundation of perfect intervals whose tuning must surely have been a priority at the time. It is also a virtuosic repertoire in which the singers must collectively establish a stable beat against which everything, above all dissonances, is calculated. Visually the singer receives no information about what the other voices are doing. To paraphrase a comment of David Fallows, whereas in Schumann there are many bar lines but you ignore them, in this repertoire there are none but they are extremely important. *Pace* Thomas Binkley, rhythmic accuracy is indispensable. If you have performed a piece like Josquin's *Virgo salutiferi* from the original sources (figure 2 and example 1), you will know that with this repertoire you *must* cultivate, nay, revel in rhythmic precision, lest the train go off the rails.¹⁵ It's not for nothing that they called it *musica mensurabilis*.



Fig. 2 – *Virgo salutiferi*, *altus primus*, mm. 1-51 in London 1070, fol. 69r. This image is reproduced here by kind permission of the Royal College of Music Library

¹⁵ The London 1070 copy of *Virgo salutiferi* is viewable at <<https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/2033>>. For comparison, see the copy in Vatican 42 (fol. 89r) at <https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Capp.Sist.42>. Sustained and precise coordination is necessary in part because the *altus primus* is one of three rhythmically active voices in this piece. For a full score see <<https://josquin.stanford.edu/work/?id=Jos2513>>.

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gra - ti - a ple - - na,
 - - - ret or - - - - bi, Non - dum di -
 - - - - bi, suc - cur - re - ret or - - - - bi,
 ple - - - na,
 or - - - - bi, or - - - - bi, or -

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stine - - - - - to jus - se -
 Non - dum di - - - - stine - - - - to ju - se -
 - - - - bi, Non - dum di - - - - stine - - - - to ju -

Ex. 1 – *Virgo salutariferi*, mm. 65-75

A related issue is adopting tempi that are supported by the sources. The Tallis Scholars helped establish the convention that the *Christe* of a mass should be sung more slowly than the first *Kyrie*.¹⁶ This is wrong. Josquin and his contemporaries usually notate the first *Kyrie* under Circle, a moderate triple meter. For the *Christe* they usually switch to Cut-C, a faster duple meter. The effect is acceleration, not deceleration.¹⁷

¹⁶ This approach can be heard already in both *Kyrie* settings on the album *Missa Pange lingua*, *Missa La sol fa re mi*, and more generally in the ensemble's tendency to slow down whenever Circle gives way to Cut-C (e.g., «*Qui tollis*», «*Et incarnatus est*»). Two other approaches popularized by the Tallis Scholars are to randomly accelerate at «*Quoniam tu solus sanctus*» (from the *Gloria*) and «*Et resurrexit*» (from the *Credo*) and to sing the «*Agnus dei III*» at an extremely slow tempo, irrespective of the mensuration sign. On the «*Agnus dei III*» see RICHARD SHERR, *The Performance of Josquin's L'homme armé Masses*, «*Early Music*», XIX, 2, 1991, pp. 261-268. On Josquin's mensural practice more generally, see JESSE RODIN, *Taking the Measure of Josquin*, «*Die Tonkunst*», XV, 1, 2021, pp. 10-28.

¹⁷ The core theoretical principle is uncontroversial, even if scholars differ on the details. (For present purposes I leave to the side the interpretation of Cut-Circle.) See most efficiently ROB C. WEGMAN, *What Is "Acceleratio Mensurae"?*, «*Music & Letters*», LXXIII,

Another problematic aspect of the modern performance tradition is the interpretation the sign '3'. In fact 'interpretation' is the wrong word, as in this case there is a very simple right and wrong: one breve (that is, three semibreve [=whole note] beats) under 3 is equivalent to one breve (two semibreve beats) under Cut-C (example 2).¹⁸ But most ensembles sing sections under 3 too fast, even to the point of willfully ignoring the rhythms in modern editions in cases where different voices move between these signs at different times.¹⁹

The image displays two musical systems side-by-side. The left system is in Cut-C time, indicated by a 'C' time signature. It consists of four staves. The top staff has a vertical bar line (breve) under the word 'Qui'. The second staff has a whole note (semibreve) under 'Qui', with an '8' below it. The third and fourth staves have a vertical bar line (breve) under 'Qui', with an '8' below the third staff. The right system is in 3 time, indicated by a '3' time signature. It also consists of four staves. The top staff has a vertical bar line (breve) under 'Cum' and a whole note (semibreve) under 'sanc -'. The second staff has a whole note (semibreve) under 'Cum' and a whole note (semibreve) under 'sanc -', with an '8' below it. The third staff has a vertical bar line (breve) under 'Cum' and a whole note (semibreve) under 'sanc -', with an '8' below it. The bottom staff has a vertical bar line (breve) under 'Cum' and a whole note (semibreve) under 'sanc -'.

Ex. 2 – The proper temporal relationship between one breve under Cut-C and one breve under 3

4, 1992, pp. 515-524. Even with respect to pieces notated exclusively under Cut-C, many ensembles adopt tempos that, considering the function of the vertical stroke as a sign of acceleration, are arguably too slow.

¹⁸ See, most comprehensively (albeit with respect to a slightly later period), MARTIN HAM, *A Sense of Proportion: The Performance of Sesquialtera, ca. 1515-ca. 1565*, «Musica Disciplina», LVI, 2011, pp. 79-274. Occasionally (usually when followed by the sign C), 3 applies at a lower metric level, such that three minims take the time of two, with a very different musical result. From the sources there is no difficulty in distinguishing between the two cases. At all events the fundamental relationship, known in the period as sesquialtera (a ratio of 3:2), is the same.

¹⁹ The Tallis Scholars and many other ensembles often equate the minim of Cut-C to the semibreve of 3, which makes the tempo of music notated under the latter sign about 33% too fast. Occasionally ensembles take an opposite approach, with tempos for 3 that are too slow relative to Cut-C. See also RODIN, *Taking the Measure of Josquin* cit., p. 13.

Taking these problems together: the modern performance tradition is overwhelmed by tempos for Cut-C that are significantly too slow and tempos for '3' that are somewhat too fast. We can hardly expect the music to make sense if we consistently misconstrue these very basic mensural relationships. Indeed Josquin's phrases, which as I've argued elsewhere are calculated to produce strong effects, lose all their poignancy when performed much too slowly or much too quickly.²⁰ Only with a plausible range of tempi do we stand a chance of understanding the flow of the music.

With these principles in place, let me ask the singers to join me up here. I want to begin by thanking them – I am beyond lucky to work with such extraordinary musicians and such wonderful people. Their backgrounds are varied; some have naturally brighter sounds than others, and some have more experience than others with non-western-classical or pre-1830s training. Several teach voice. All are brilliant technicians, and all are willing to experiment. But the main point is that each of these singers fully commits, and that each has a strong, unique sound. With a uniform approach to vowel production and placement, those heterogeneous sounds can blend, but without merging into a homogeneous mass.

We'll begin with the piece I showed a moment ago: the motet *Virgo salutiferi*, composed during Josquin's year in Ferrara. The opening of this motet responds to the word «tonantis» («of the thundering One»), but only when we allow ourselves to approach it that way.

[Performance of *Virgo salutiferi*, mm. 1-51 by Cut Circle at about 70 semibreves per minute]²¹

Let's shift to something lighthearted: the song *Faulte d'argent*, which has been recorded by many ensembles.²² Our approach emphasizes the silliness of the text – through bright vowels, yes, but also through consonants that arrive early (e.g., “ffaulte,” “jje,” “rreveille”) and occasional expressive portamento, features that are neither encouraged nor proscribed by the original sources. All of these choices can be made to jibe with a calculatedly precise approach to rhythm and tempo. Thus, Cut Circle strives to balance rhythmic

²⁰ See JESSE RODIN, *Josquin's Rome: Hearing and Composing in the Sistine Chapel*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, especially ch. 2.

²¹ The performance is available in the recording of the conference, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgkQpNb2270&t=9387s>>, at 2:33:10. For MP3's playable at different tempos, visit <<https://josquin.stanford.edu/work/?id=Jos2513>>.

²² For the score, see <<https://josquin.stanford.edu/work/?id=Jos2907>>.

accuracy, a feature strongly encouraged by the material form of the surviving sources, with risk-taking in the realms of text and musical expression. Even more than this, the ensemble cultivates strong, independent delivery in the context of one-on-a-part performance: five singers, five unique but nonetheless complementary sounds.

[Performance of *Faulte d'argent* by Cut Circle at about 70 semibreves per minute.]²³

Today marks 500 years since Josquin's death, but only about fifty years since modern performances of his music became relatively widespread. Over the next fifty years we have our work cut out for us. The first step is easy: abandon *bel canto*, *politesse*, and reverential (and/or anti-historical) tempi. From there we drop off a cliff, since for so many performance questions it is impossible to identify a right answer. Instead, the challenge will be to seek out new voices, new vocal techniques, and new stylistic approaches, for the sake not of lazily cannibalizing an existing musical tradition that 'sounds cool', but of discovering new ways of bringing the details of this specific repertoire to life. Up to a point this project is unavoidably 'presentist'. But when the work proceeds from deep engagement with the music and the musical sources and benefits from thousands of hours of thoughtful rehearsals and performances, it also becomes meaningfully historical. Indeed my plea is that we muster the courage to take the past seriously – to honor the music by bringing to bear all of our intellectual and creative capacities. At the very least, we can start by abandoning that which we know to be wrong.

²³ The performance is available in the recording of the conference, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgkQpNb2270&t=9387s>>, at 2:36:20. For MP3's playable at different tempos, visit <<https://josquin.stanford.edu/work/?id=Jos2907>>.

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Abstract

For the past several decades, performances of Josquin's vocal music have favoured an approach developed in the United Kingdom in the early 1980s by groups such as the Hilliard Ensemble and the Tallis Scholars. This approach has much to recommend it: good tuning, rhythmic accuracy, and vibrato-free singing that makes it possible to hear the individual lines – all features that helped spark an appreciation of Josquin by a generation of enthusiasts and scholars, this writer included. By now most of the securely attributed works are available in high-quality recordings that adopt this general performance style.

Still, with every approach come benefits and costs – and significant drawbacks can be associated with a sound that emerged out of the bel canto and Anglican choral traditions and through experience with much later sixteenth-century repertoires. On reflection, it seems likely that however attractive, the sound for Renaissance polyphony made popular some four decades ago and still in vogue today would have been unfamiliar to listeners in the years around 1500.

This contribution introduces ideas about rhythm, tempo, and timbre that I and Cut Circle have been developing over the past several years through work together and with the original sources. Applying a fresh set of ideas about performance practice can perhaps get us a bit closer to a sound for Josquin's music that he and his contemporaries would have recognized and appreciated.

Keywords

Renaissance vocal practice, Conrad von Zabern, tempo and mensuration, *Virgo salutiferi*, *Faulte d'argent*